

I support media diversity

I am writing to you today to comment on Docket No. 02-277, The Biennial Review of the FCC's broadcast media ownership rules. In its goals to promote competition, diversity and localism in today's media market, I strongly believe that the FCC should retain all of the current media ownership rules now in question. These rules serve the public interest by limiting the market power of already huge companies in the broadcast industry.

I do not believe that the studies commissioned by the FCC accurately demonstrate the negative affects media deregulation and consolidation have had on media diversity. While there may be indeed be more sources of media than ever before, the spectrum of views presented have become more limited. A couple evenings of flipping through the local news would confirm this.

The right to carry on informed debate and discussion of current events is part of the founding philosophy of our nation. Our forefathers believed that democracy was best served by a diverse marketplace of ideas. If the FCC allows our media outlets to merge, our ability to have open, informed discussion with a wide variety of viewpoints will be compromised.

The public interest will best be served by preserving media ownership rules in question in this proceeding.

In addition to the official hearing on this matter in Richmond, VA, I strongly urge the FCC to hold additional hearings elsewhere around the nation (including NY, NY and Austin, TX) to solicit the widest possible participation from the public which will be the most directly affected by the outcomes of these decisions. I think it is important for the FCC to not only consider the points of view of those with a financial interest in this issue, but also those with a social or civic interest.

With the serious impact these rule changes will have on our democracy, it is incumbent on the Commission to take the time to review these issues more thoroughly and allow the American people to have a meaningful say in the process.

And these comments I would like to address specifically to Mr. Powell: I have heard you speak on TV and read interviews with you in newspapers where you state that the emergence of the Internet has rewritten the rules of news delivery. But people only know of the existence of a new event by having that event brought to their attention. The internet is awash with a jumble of headlines and news feeds and yet people won't know to investigate a story unless it is brought to their attention in the first place. In this regard, traditional news sources play the same role they always have. The Internet is a great source of follow-up information, but in order to consult on-line sources you have to know that the event occurred in the first place. Looking at my own news habits, I often go to the internet only after having heard something on the TV or radio. Also, to get a sense of what the shape of that day's news I often tune into a regular network news program or read the newspaper.

If network and local news decide to skip a story of importance, I don't know to go looking for it elsewhere. (Case in point: the underreported Telecommunications Act of 1996).

Regarding local news, I challenge you to sit down with me and watch the local news in Austin, Texas for a week and tell me if it is fact-based and

informative. It isn't. The channels compete with each other by producing "fun" stories, "human interest" stories, previews of coming movies and TV shows and basically any kind of eye candy they can come up with. I have watched the quality of news programming decline steadily. It's not a matter of opinion. It's a matter of how many hard news stories with facts are transmitted each half hour: fewer and fewer.

I understand, too, that in keeping with your point of view the government cannot regulate content but the studies you commissioned were pretty disingenuous. Awards are given. Ratings are taken. But if the stories are "Are you high maintenance?" and "How to get a date" as I have seen on local news, the baseline of local news and national news is profoundly low. Sure someone gets more awards and higher ratings, but if it's all junk, what does that matter? How can you glibly look away from this and say the wealth of information and diversity of opinion is robust? Just inject a little common sense into your view. This infotainment does not serve the public's interest and if the FCC can't stand up for the public's interest on our airwaves, who can?

Most sincerely,

Christian Zappone